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ABSTRACT

Designed for high school global education classes, this document examines the consequences of dependency and self-reliance in developing nations. The paper points out that millions of people are denied control over basic resources and have little influence over decisions which deeply affect their lives. The forms of dependency and insecurity are illustrated through two brief case studies of a Bangladesh woman working for local landlords and a Puerto Rican farmer who stopped growing beans because a U.S. company shipped and sold canned beans at a cheaper price than he could afford to do. Next, several actions toward self-reliance taken by individual countries are noted: cooperative farming in Boureima, a rural women's program in Bangladesh, and the national food program in Nicaragua. Three steps toward self-reliance are then outlined: (1) replacing dependent or oppressive relationships with cooperation based on mutual respect; (2) discovering and gaining control over one's own resources; and (3) building a wider and stronger community. The document concludes with suggestions for how citizens of wealthy nations can help poor nations work toward self-reliance. Ideas for action and a brief reference list are included. (KC)

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# SELF-RELIANCE vs DEPENDENCY

## FACTS FOR ACTION NO. 2

Oct 82

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Oxfam American, Boston MA

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Oxfam America
# Facts For Action
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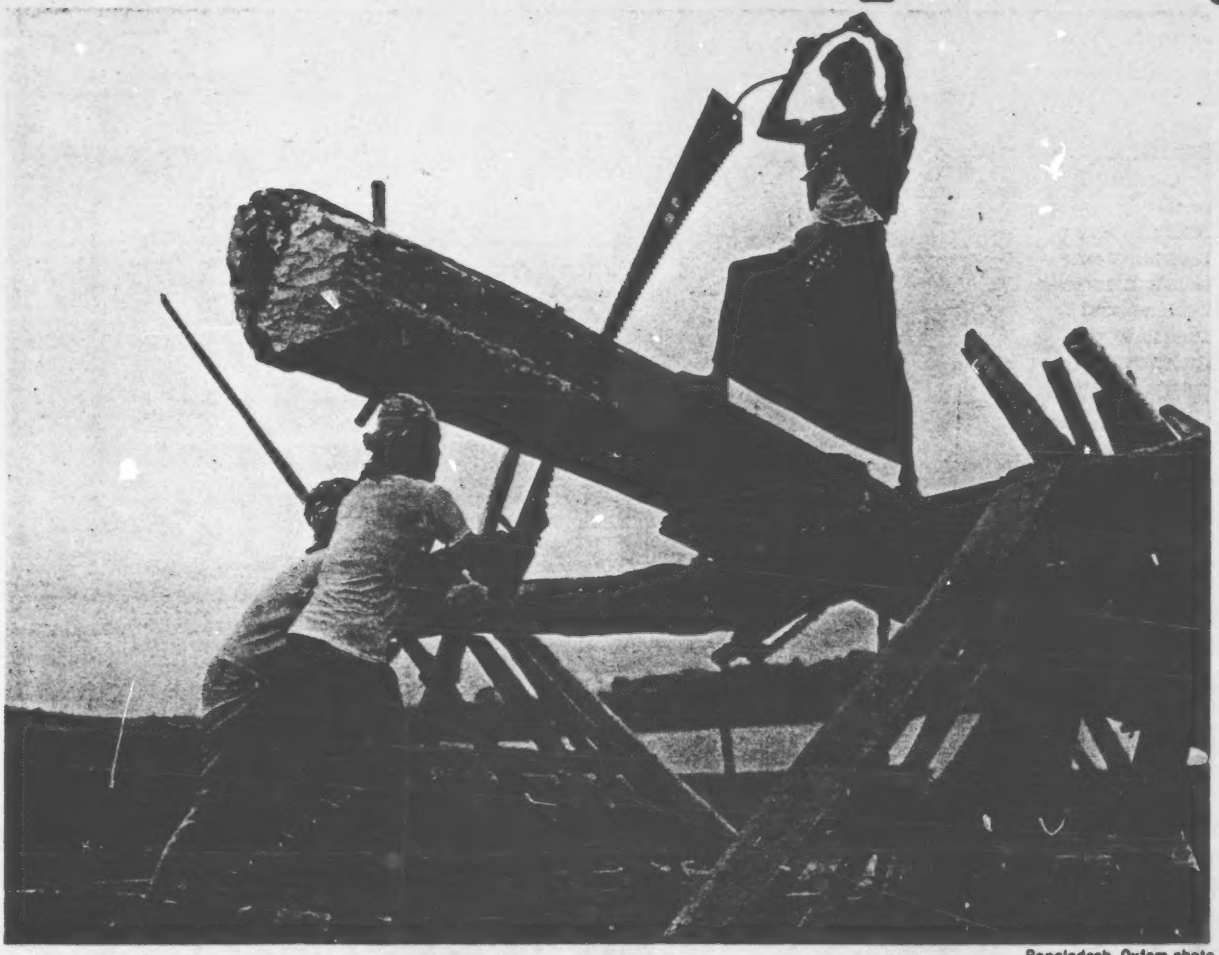
# Self-Reliance vs. Dependency



Bangladesh. Oxfam photo

## The Need for Self-Reliance

Self-reliance is defined here as the process by which people work to secure their own basic needs using their own resources and making their own decisions. It is the oldest and most fundamental form of human development. But many millions in today's world are denied control over basic resources and have little influence over decisions which deeply affect their lives. The result, for most of them, is poverty, hunger, dependency and insecurity.

"I want to learn to read and write so that I can stop being the shadow of other people."

A Brazilian Peasant

"Few people in the wealthy countries have any detailed conception of poverty in the Third World and the forms that it takes. Many hundreds of millions of people in the poorest countries are preoccupied solely with survival and elementary needs. For them, work is frequently not available, or pay is low and conditions barely tolerable . . . Permanent insecurity is the condition of the poor."

(North-South: A Program for Survival)

## Dependence and insecurity take many forms in the Third World:

**Boureima** was a 40-year-old farmer in the poor West African nation of Upper Volta. He had a family of 10, including children of his dead brother. Boureima's tiny plot of land, less than one acre, did not allow him to grow enough millet and sorghum to adequately feed his family. So he and they were usually hungry and often tired from malnutrition. Boureima wanted to begin vegetable farming, and had hopes of growing some vegetable for market. But to obtain more land, insure transport of his crops to market, and provide crop storage when needed, he would have to become indebted to and dependent upon local middlemen and money-lenders. So he worked during the dry season on the coastal plantations in the Ivory Coast, a neighboring country, where he could earn a little badly-needed cash for his family. He and his family seemed doomed to a choice between perpetual hunger and dependency upon local middlemen.

Bangladesh, Oxfam photo

**Sharifa** lived all of her 32 years in rural Bangladesh. She never went to school because she was a female child in a poor family. Her marriage was arranged for her when she was 15. Sharifa spent most of the next 10 years working an average of 15 hours a day at home — preparing food, caring for her children, husking rice. Her husband left her because she had not given birth to a son. She then had to find work in the fields of local landlords. She was also forced to beg along the roads in order to provide for her daughters.

**Rafael**, an 80-year-old farmer, told this story to participants on a recent Oxfam America study tour in Puerto Rico: "We farmers in this district used to grow a lot of beans. It was our life. Then a U.S. company began shipping canned beans down here, selling them at cheaper prices than we could afford to sell our beans. Many of us went into debt and had to stop growing beans. Some of my neighbors even had to sell their land to pay debts. The company selling the canned beans bought up a lot of land. Then, when they had finished us off, they raised the price of their canned beans. Now people in the cities are feeling the pinch when they go to the market to buy food. It's the same story all over Puerto Rico."

Bangladesh, Oxfam photo

Nicaragua, OA photo

## The Larger Picture

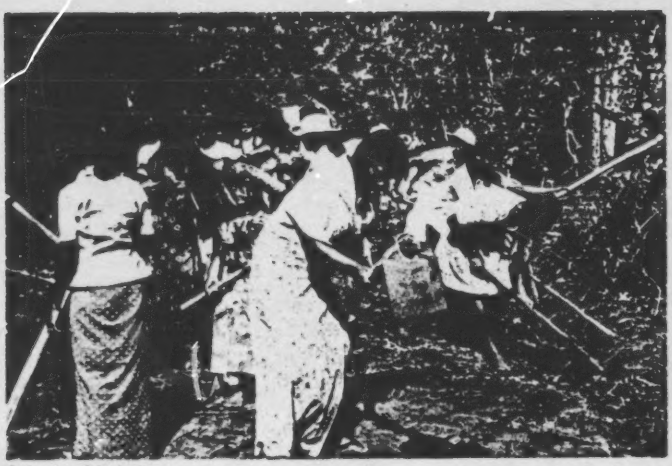
The dependency and insecurity of these individuals are related to larger national and international situations.

The foreign plantation owners in the Ivory Coast who use Boureima's labor to pick their crops each year would like to ensure that he will continue to need the work they give him, with the low wages and poor conditions they provide. Some politicians in the Ivory Coast and in Upper Volta also want Boureima to continue to be dependent on plantation work. He is part of a cheap labor pool for the Ivory Coast, and as long as he can survive with added plantation work, he is less likely to protest in Upper Volta against his poor conditions and lack of adequate land and facilities.

The landlords with whom Sharifa tried to find work took advantage of her need and hired her for less than they would hire a man. Government officials said nothing about this because it was the custom and because the government did not want to alienate the landlords upon whom it depended for some of its support.

Rafael and his neighbors were victims of policies which emphasized foreign industrial and business investment at the expense of local farmers and local food production. As a result, Puerto Rico became industrialized and wealthier than other Caribbean islands, but now imports most of its food from U.S. companies at high prices set by the companies. And well over half the population has had to rely on U.S. Government food stamps to eat! If U.S. aid and investment were cut off today, Puerto Rico would quickly become a hungry island, like some of its neighbors.

Poverty and hunger are very often the result of national and international policies and patterns which concentrate resources and decision-making power in the hands of a few, while the majority become increasingly insecure and dependent upon the interests of the few. Resources, work, energy and talent go to meeting the needs and interests of the few rather than to providing for the basic needs of all people. This breeds insecurity among those dependent upon others, those who fear the increasing desperation of people who have nothing.



SriLanka. OA photo

## Toward Self-Reliance

Changing this situation in a positive and constructive way requires breaking the pattern of resource deprivation, dependency and insecurity in which the poor find themselves. Increasingly, people in poor countries are doing that, through a process of self-reliant development.

Today, Boureima's family is eating better. URCOMAYA, a farmers' cooperative union, was organized a few years ago and, with assistance from Oxfam America totalling over $200,000 by 1982, has helped hundreds of farmers to start vegetable farming. This has greatly improved the diet and health of local farm families. The cooperative has been able to pool the resources of local farmers and to obtain credit and resources which individual farmers would only be able to obtain through the middlemen, if at all. Building cold storage facilities has enabled the cooperative farmers to by-pass the middlemen and to sell directly using their own facilities. Boureima has been able to buy some clothing, a bicycle and fuel, and other badly-needed things for his family.

Sharifa and other women in her district now have a new life. In 1971, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee was started, and has become a thriving rural development organization throughout Bangladesh. Since 1976, through grants from Oxfam America which today total over $100,000, BRAC has initiated and supported a rural women's program in the Jamalpur region where Sharifa lives. The goal was to raise the level of literacy, personal health, economic status and cultural awareness among rural poor women. By the end of the first year of the program, the women had established 15 educational centers, mothers' clubs, and savings groups. Women learned to deal with child care problems, financial problems, and

Upper Volta. Oxfam photo

many other practical matters they needed for their self-reliant survival. Some women began to raise poultry and to garden to supplement their meagre incomes. The program demonstrated that women without formal education or training could become effective leaders in village and community development, as others began to seek their advice about practical, community matters. Women in the program described many changes in their lives: "Before, the elders threatened us for joining the program. Now they are silent." "Our husbands used to beat us and our mothers-in-law abused us. Now, we command their respect." "Before, when our children asked for help with school lessons, we couldn't help. Now that we can read, we can help them."

"We used to beg for charity. Today we can manage for ourselves."

Kampuchea, Oxfam photo

Nicaragua, OA photo

If Rafael lived in Nicaragua instead of Puerto Rico, he would have a quite different story to tell. Small farmers in Nicaragua today are very much involved in a national program for greater food self-reliance. After years of desperate poverty, insecurity and dependency under the Somoza dictatorship, Nicaraguans now have a government committed to policies which benefit the poorest people and which promote food self-reliance. Unable to pay the rising costs of imported food, and unwilling to rely on rich nations for basic food imports, Nicaragua has launched a national food program (**Programa de Alimentacion Nacional** — PAN). PAN includes mobilizing the desire and energy of thousands of peasant farmers who want to provide for themselves. The program involves communicating simple technical information and education about agricultural practices, health and a variety of related practical matters. Oxfam America has supported this effort by funding the production and distribution of learning materials, through a grant which by 1982 totalled nearly $300,000. A key element of PAN is construction of 42,000 small granaries. Grain spoilage due to inadequate storage was costing peasants nearly 40 percent of their food crop each year. Saving that amount would benefit both the individual peasants and the country as a whole, thus helping to meet Nicaragua's food deficits. The granaries are designed to be built in two or three days by two farmers working together, using local natural materials which can be obtained free or at minimal cost. Each granary can hold up to 3,000 pounds of corn. PAN is helping integrate peasants into a more productive and beneficial national life based on self-reliant food production.

Antigua, OA photo

## Self-Reliance is a Process

These and other examples show that self-reliance is a process involving several steps.

First, self-reliance undermines and changes dependent or oppressive relationships, replacing them with cooperation based on mutual respect. The dominance of a few landlords is changed if peasants can work for themselves in peasant cooperatives. Nations moving toward greater food self-reliance can depend less on richer countries, and the rich countries are less able to use food as a weapon or a source of control over countries which have become more self-reliant.

Second, self-reliance means relying on oneself to build new, more human conditions. This involves gradually discovering and gaining control over one's own resources, which include talent, intelligence and other abilities, as well as material resources. The members of a cooperative farm learn to read and keep financial accounts in order to advance their business and to keep others from cheating them. They develop a better understanding of how to marshall and preserve their own resources. They emphasize the necessities first, and satisfy those through their own labor.

Third, self-reliance means building a wider and stronger community based on mutual respect. The women of the Jamalpur program are building communities in which they are changing their old subordinate status to that of respected partners in the development and betterment of their communities.

Bangladesh, Oxfam photo

Bangladesh, FAO photo

SriLanka, OA photo

## What About the Helping Hand?

Because most poor people in Third World countries do not control enough resources to build upon and to take risks for growth, they sometimes require outside help to begin the process of self-reliant development. But the purpose of outside help should be to eliminate dependency as quickly and as completely as possible. Help should be "giving so the poor have the means to permanently escape from their poverty," as a Medieval philosopher said.

Help should also be given in such a way that those who receive it actually make the important decisions about the help they are getting. As the director of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee put it, "Who knows the needs of the village best? The people who live in it."

Outside help can also mean working to change policies which perpetuate dependent poverty. Because of their wealth and power, U.S. companies and the U.S. Government have considerable influence over the daily lives of millions in the poor world. U.S. citizens can offer significant help to the people of the Third World in breaking the pattern of poverty and insecurity by working in the United States for more equitable foreign and international policies. Stopping U.S. military assistance to a repressive government in a poor country, for example, can be a very major help to the poor of that country in breaking out of their poverty and dependency. Supporting the call for a New International Economic order (NIEO), which the United Nations first approved in 1974, would help provide some basis for many poor countries seeking greater self-reliance. It would support the right of each country to control the natural resources within its own boundaries and the right of poor countries to form organizations among themselves to get better prices for the products they sell. The NIEO would also ensure greater decision-making power for the poor countries in international institutions such as the World Bank, and would establish means to lessen the dependency of the poor countries upon individual rich countries for important needs. But the United States, almost alone in the world, has opposed several key aspects of the NIEO. Americans can make an important contribution toward self-reliance in the world by learning more about the issues involved in the NIEO and why it is important in the eyes of many leaders of Third World nations.

Self-reliance is both a very simple and a very complex process of human development involving material changes and growing self-awareness, and encompassing local, national and international realities. Self-reliance is like the proverbial journey of a thousand miles — it begins with the first small step.

Jim Phillips, Oxfam America Staff

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## Ideas for Action

**Form a study group** with friends, colleagues, members of your congregation or school. Select a facilitator and discuss the parameters of self-reliance at the local, national and international level. Tie self-reliance to global security issues. What you learn in the group can be a guide to action at both personal and community levels.

**Form a small group to investigate food production, distribution and consumption** in your community/state. For example, how much of the food you consume is produced locally, and how much of it is imported from other parts of the country and the world? How much of it is produced by small farmers versus large farmers? Who distributes the food you eat? How much of the money you pay for specific food items actually goes to producers? etc. Contact the Cornucopia Project of the Rodale Press (see below) for guidelines. Share your findings with others, including the local media and Congressional representatives.

**Explore the potential for greater self-reliance** in your own community, and share your ideas with others. The following organizations provide valuable information on local self-reliance:

**The Cornucopia Project of Rodale Press,** 33 East Minor Street, Emmaus, PA 18049, offers resources on domestic food/land issues and practical alternatives.

**Earthwork-Center for Rural Studies,** 3410 19th Street, San Francisco, CA 94110, provides information on land issues, cooperatives, direct farmer-consumer marketing.

**Institute for Food and Development Policy (IFDP),** 1885 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94110, has resources on the potential for food self-reliance around the world, and U.S. food and agricultural policies.

**Write an article** on self-reliance in the Third World and/or your own community for your local newspaper. For example, you can present your own definition of global security and bring the readers' attention to the need for increased self-reliance at local, national and international levels. Contact Oxfam America for guidelines on writing articles and letters to newspaper editors.

**Organize a fundraising and consciousness raising event** and use the money you raise to help Oxfam America's self-reliant projects in the Third World. Contact Oxfam America for fundraising ideas.

Ethiopia, Oxfam photo

## Further Reading:

American Friends Service Committee, **Taking Charge.** Philadelphia, PA: AFSC, 1977. 341 pp. $2.95. Available in bookstores.

Ariyaratne, A.T., **The Struggle to Awaken.** Sri Lanka: Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, 1978. 70 pp. $3.50. Available from Oxfam America.

Independent Commission on International Development Issues, **North-South: A Program for Survival.** Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1980. 304 pp. $4.95. Available from Oxfam America.

The Cornucopia Project of Rodale Press, **Empty Breadbasket? The Coming Challenge to America's Food Supply and What We Can Do About It.** Emmaus, PA: The Cornucopia Project, 1980. 150 pp. $5.00. Available from Oxfam America.

Lappe, Frances Moore and Joseph Collins, **Food First: Beyond the Myth of Scarcity.** San Francisco, CA: Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1979. 619 pp. $3.95. Available from Oxfam America.

McRobie, George, **Small is Possible.** New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1980. 300 pp. $5.95. Available in bookstores.

**Oxfam America** is an international development and disaster relief organization based in Boston. Oxfam America was founded in 1970 and is one of six autonomous Oxfams, including two in Canada and one each in Great Britain, Australia and Belgium. The name "Oxfam" came from the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief, founded in England in 1942. Building self-reliance is our most important goal. We fund local, grassroots groups in 21 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In the United States, Oxfam America works to inform policymakers and the general public about the root causes of world hunger and poverty. Oxfam America neither seeks nor accepts government funds, but relies entirely upon private institutions and citizens.